DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 370 FL 016 757

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TITLE Strategies of Peer Interaction in the Monolingual ESL Class.
PUB DATE Jun 86
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual University of South Florida Linguistics Club Conference on Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching (6th, Tampa, FL, June 27-28, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; College Students; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; Interaction; Interpersonal Communication; *Peer Relationship; Personal Autonomy; Second Language Instruction; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Small Group Instruction; Spanish Speaking; *Speech Habits
IDENTIFIERS *Error Correction (Language); *Self Correction Strategies

ABSTRACT

A study of repair in conversations between students of English as a second language (ESL) focused on: (1) strategies of negotiation for meaning used by students with a common language background (Spanish) when speaking English; and (2) the dynamics of repair during pair work, a frequently used technique for eliciting conversation. Verbal interactions during pair work and free conversations between three pairs of Puerto Rican university students were videotaped, transcribed, and analyzed. The study yielded findings generally similar to those of an earlier study (by Joan Schwartz, 1980) with regard to self-repair, other-repair, repair initiator techniques, and negotiation patterns. Overall, self-initiated and self-repair techniques were preferred. Some self-initiator strategies were lexical; others were non-lexical. Strategies during repair included word replacement, reordering, and word search. Despite the predominance of self-correction, the subjects were able to correct each other, especially when self-repair was not working. In this study (unlike the earlier one) other-repair was generally syntactical and lexical rather than phonological. Other-initiator strategies included question words, repetitions of the trouble source, possible interpretations of the previous turn, extralinguistic aids, and didactic roles. The most important departure from the earlier study was in the use of the vernacular. In the present study, use of the native Spanish was extremely controlled and restricted. Pair work also revealed some new repair phenomena and was a rich source of interaction. (MSE)

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Paper presented at the Annual University of South Florida Linguistics Club Conference on Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching (6th, Tampa, FL, June 27-28, 1986).

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ABSTRACT

STRATEGIES OF PEER INTERACTION IN THE MONOLINGUAL ESL CLASS

The research for this paper was prompted by the desire to replicate--under modified conditions--Schwartz's study on repair in conversations between ESL students (1980). While Schwartz's subjects were of mixed language backgrounds, the ones in this study share Spanish as their native language. The study had two major goals: 1. to find out what strategies of negotiation for meaning students with a monolingual background use when they are speaking English and 2. to observe the dynamics of repair during pair work, a frequently used technique for eliciting conversations. In a broad sense, this paper represents an incursion into the realm of peer input, a key factor in the development of second language acquisition and learning.

Verbal interactions including pair work and free conversations in English between three pairs of Puerto Rican students (enrolled at Inter American University of Puerto Rico) were video-taped and subsequently transcribed with attention to both linguistic and extralinguistic behavior. The study yielded similar findings to Schwartz's in regard to self-repair and other-repair, repair initiator techniques, and negotiation patterns. Some differences were observed, particularly where pair work was involved and in connection to the use of the vernacular.

Overall, there was a preference for self-initiated repair (73%) and for self-repair (77%). Some self-initiator strategies were lexical (tag questions, apologies, and repetitions); others were non-lexical (cutoffs, pauses, spaceholders, and gestures). Strategies during repair included word replacement, reordering, and word search.

Despite the predominance of self-correction, the subjects in this study demonstrated that they were able to correct each other, especially when they were unable to repair the problem themselves. While in Schwartz's study other-repair was particularly evident in the area of phonology, in this study other-repair was syntactical and lexical rather than phonological. Other-initiator strategies included question words, repetitions of the trouble source, possible interpretations of the previous turn, extralinguistic aids, and didactic roles.

The most important departure from Schwartz's findings lay in the use of the vernacular. In this study, the native language (Spanish) did appear. However, it was extremely controlled and restricted, and in proportion to the English used almost insignificant. The students' use of Spanish was sporadic (vs. continued), unconscious (vs. conscious), and unheeded (vs. contagious).

The pair work assignment also revealed some phenomena nonexistent in Schwartz's study:

1. occurrence of self-and other-repair during reading aloud,
2. relatively uninhibited disposition for and acceptance of other-repair,
3. didactic attitude assumed by the more proficient students while doing the exercises,

4. rigorous turn-taking routines,
5. proficiency and personality as factors affecting the organization of the discourse.

Pair work proved to be a rich source of interaction, providing content and organization to the students' discourse as well as an invaluable opportunity for the students to negotiate meaning and manipulate sentences in the second language. Even though they were not self-motivated to converse in English (students in Puerto Rico do not need English to communicate among themselves), the learners in this study demostrated, and hopefully realized, that English can be an alternate vehicle for peer interaction and socialization.

STRATEGIES OF PEER INTERACTION IN THE MONOLINGUAL ESL CLASS

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the processes of discourse that researchers have been trying to explain is the negotiation for meaning. Negotiation has been defined as "those exchanges in which there is some overt indication that understanding between participants has not been complete" (Gass and Varonis 1985: 151). While some professionals have dedicated themselves to the process among native speakers (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), others have observed the same phenomenon among second language learners (Schwartz 1980, van Lier 1984, Gass and Varonis 1985, Long and Porter 1985, Pica and Doughty 1984). Schwartz (1980), for example, has examined how ESL learners of mixed language backgrounds repair trouble in conversations and how they manage to achieve communication in English. This paper is the result of an attempt to replicate Schwartz's study in a monolingual situation. Its purpose was to find out what strategies of negotiation for meaning Puerto Rican students use when they are speaking English. Since interactions in English between Puerto Rican ESL students normally occur in class, this study had a second purpose: to observe the dynamics of repair during pair work, a frequently used technique for eliciting conversations. In a broad sense, this paper is an incursion into the realm of peer input, a key factor in the development of second language acquisition.

II. SUBJECTS

Three pairs of Puerto Rican students learning English at Inter American University (I. A. U.) participated in this study. The first dyad consisted of two students (Jorge and Waldemar) from English 102 and the two other dyads of students (Vilma and Neville; Lourdes and Juan) from English 103. Both courses

belong to the basic level of the ESL program at I. A. U. In two of the dyads the students came from the same section. In another dyad the students, who belonged to different sections of the same course, met each other minutes before their conversation was recorded.

III. METHOD

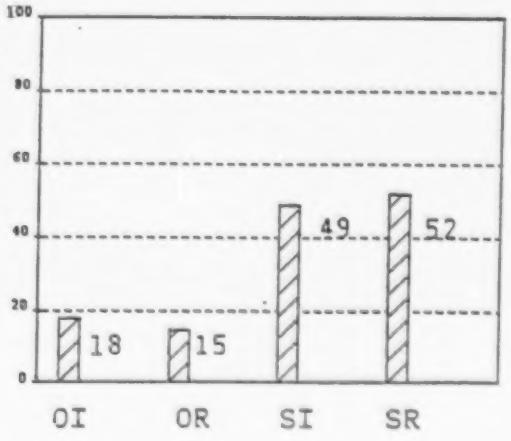
Verbal interactions including pair work and free conversations in English between three pairs of Puerto Rican students were video-taped and subsequently transcribed. The subjects were appointed to attend the video studio for the taping sessions. During these, the subjects sat across each other at a table. They were instructed to work first on a specific section of their textbooks taking turns in reading a selection, asking, and answering questions as they were accustomed to do in class. They were also instructed to continue talking freely once they had completed the textbook-guided pair work. The two English 103 pairs were suggested to talk about the preparation of an oral report they had been assigned in class. One pair of students talked for exactly 15 minutes as had been intended. The two other pairs gave visible and verbal indications of tiredness before they completed the quarter-hour, and thus their tapes were somewhat shorter (9 and 10 minutes respectively.) The video/audio tapes were transcribed with attention to both linguistic and extralinguistic behavior using a simplified version of the notation system utilized by Schwartz.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

Observation of the video/audio tapes yielded similar findings to Schwartz's in regard to self-repair and other-repair, repair initiator techniques, and negotiation patterns. Overall, there was a preference for self-initiated repair (73%) and for self-repair (77%). Some differences and unreported processes were also detected, particularly where pair work was involved.

A. Self-Initiated Repair

As can be seen in the graph below there was a preference among the students in this research for self-initiated repair, i. e. in the majority of the cases the students took the initiative of correcting themselves when they perceived a trouble source in their own speech. In the three conversations, there was a total of 67 instances of negotiation; 49 of those were self-initiated (73%) and 18 were other-initiated (27%).



OI = other-initiated repair
OR = other-repair
SI = self-initiated repair
SR = self-repair

Usually, self-initiated repair occurred in the same turn:

Jorge: Yeah... and she's father... and her father.

Less frequently it happened after the space of a turn:

Lourdes: And where...you study?

Juan: I'm...

Lourdes: ...what you study?

Self-initiated repair is frequently motivated by the desire to make oneself understood. As Schwartz points out, "this means that the speaker must frame and

redo concepts which are potential trouble sources for the auditor" (1980:141). Various initiator strategies were employed by the students in this study in their efforts to put through their verbal messages clearly and understandably. Some were lexical strategies such as tag questions ("Right?," "Eso está bien?"), apologies ("I'm sorry"), and repetitions. Others were non-lexical, such as cutoffs (words which are interrupted and not fully articulated), pauses, spaceholders (eh..., ah...), and gestures.

Examples:

1. Lexical initiator strategies

   a. Tag questions

      Waldemar: Are... are quite a few, no?

      Waldemar: Is there any woman? Right?

      Waldemar: What his wallet... Fred Collins?
      Eso está bien?

   b. Repetitions

      Neville: But Jane is working in his office...
      in his office... her office.

   c. Apologies

      Juan: How many people in your family? I'm sorry... persons.

2. Non-lexical initiator strategies

   a. Cutoffs

      Vilma: He came very early. He noticed you weren't the-here.

   b. Pauses

      Vilma: She notice he's come late... she's come late...

   c. Spaceholders

      Waldemar: I going do the answer b... eh... the question b.

   d. Gestures

      Raising gaze

      Waldemar: Are... are quite a few, no? (Looks up)

Hand movements

Lourdes: ...I have two sisters.
Juan: Older than you?
Lourdes: No, one.. one older... and (moves hand probably in search of word "younger").

Besides the above mentioned techniques to signal repair, there were others employed during repair. The students resorted to various operations in order to remove the trouble sources from their own speech. These included word replacement, reordering, word search, and extralinguistic help.

Word replacement

Juan: Too many parents... they are broken because... they are breaking their relationship because...

Reordering

Vilma: What... what did the typist... what the typist has just done?

Word search occurs when someone interrupts the flow of speech to think of a word. This search may result in self-repair or other-repair. In other words, the searched lexical item may be "found" by the speaker or provided by the auditor. Word searches often involve a wide range of verbal strategies like synonyms, definitions, and examples as well as extralinguistic features like iconic gestures, facial expressions, and hand movements. An interesting feature of word searches is that they sometimes turn into real negotiations of meaning between the speakers, manifesting the collaborative aspect of verbal interactions (Schwartz 1980). Many of these operations were evidenced by thestudents.

Examples:

1. Word search ending in self-repair

Waldemar: No, I go... in maratones... and... I have in a ... in a... varsity of voleyball.

2. Word search ending in other-repair

Waldemar: Where... where she is?

Jorge: What? (tilting head forward)

Waldemar: Tú sabes. Where she is... ? (moving hands)

Jorge: Oh... school?

Waldemar: Yes.

3. Use of extralinguistic features and collaborative effort in word search

Waldemar: Yes, my... my uncle live in... in ...

Jorge: Bairoa?

Waldemar: No, (shaking head and frowning) Bairoa no (makes gestures with hand: palm up, raised obliquely away from body, begins moving finger in a circular movement as if wanting to "unroll" the answer form his auditor)

Jorge: Caguax? Villarey? Villanueva? Villablanca? Retiro?

Waldemar: (Shakes head to all prompts while keeps rolling finger so that interlocutor will continue prompting)

Waldemar: Yes... in Retiro...

4. Use of an "example" to help explain a term

Juan: What I am studying?

Lourdes: Uh-huh

Juan: Pre-med

Lourdes: What ? (tilting head forward)

Juan: Pre-med

Lourdes: Ah!... Interesting...

Juan: Biology... (Although Lourdes has apparently understood the idea of "pre-med," Juan offers a further hint--biology--to lead her to the right concept.)

5. Iconic gestures in word search

Lourdes: My family is little... you know... that no big (iconic gestures).

B. Other-initiated repair

This study also yielded evidence of other-initiated repair, i. e. corrections or negotiations started by the listener. (See graph on page 3.) Other-initiated repair may result in self-repair or other-repair. Native speakers usually correct themselves when pointed out an error or trouble source. Furthermore, speakers will give the producer of a trouble source numerous chances to repair his/her own speech. It is not uncommon for ESL students, however, to correct each other in a conversation, especially when they are unable to repair the problem themselves. In Schwartz's study other-repair was particularly evident in the area of phonology (probably because the subjects belonged to different language backgrounds and had different phonological interference problems). In this study, however, other-repair was lexical or syntactical rather than phonological and , interestingly, it was almost as frequent as self-repair. Of 18 cases of other-initiated repair, 10 resulted in self-repair and 8 in other-repair.

Examples:

1. Other-initiated self-repair

   Juan: She as beauty as you?

   Lourdes: What?

   Juan: They are as beauty as you? Your other sisters?

2. Other-initiated other-repair

   Vilma: Has my boss come yet? Yes, he...

   Neville: She...

   Vilma: Yes, she has.

Other-initiated repair of syntactical feautures did not necessarily produce correct forms. Notice Jorge's incorrect "correction" in the next example.

Waldemar: What is looking at his wallet is Fred Collins?

Jorge: What is looking Fred?

Waldemar: What is looking Fred?

As in Schwartz's study, other-initiator techniques included repetition of the trouble source (as in the above example when Waldemar repeats Jorge's question verbatim), question words querying the entire proposition,

Waldemar: Ah... I going do answer b (looks up).

Jorge: What?

Waldemar: I going do the answer b... eh... the question b.

partial repetitions of the trouble source,

Jorge: There are also a few women.

Waldemar: A few woman?

Jorge: Uh-huh!

and possible interpretations of the previous turn.

Lourdes: ...I'm talking to teenagers and smoking.

Juan: Smoking what? Cigarettes or pot?

Lourdes: Cigarettes and drugs and all that.

Extralinguistic features also signalled other-initiated repair. Frequently, question words like "What" or "Huh" querying a previous turn were accompanied by frowning gestures and a tilting forward of the head, or simply by looking up at the producer of the trouble source. The absence of extralinguistic reaction also initiated repair.

Vilma: Peter's talking to her girlfriend... to his girlfriend. "Have you seen the movie yet?"

Neville: (no response)

Vilma: Yes, I have... girl's answers...

This study also produced evidence of students adopting the role of "teachers" in conversations. The " teaching nature" of negotiations, pointed out by Schwartz (1980: 151), was nowhere more evident than in the following example from the data:

Waldemar:	...Is there any woman? Right? (looks up)
Jorge:	Are there...
Waldemar:	Are there...
Jorge:	Woman is plural. Are there any woman in the... There are also a few woman.
Waldemar:	What? (looks up)
Jorge:	There are also a few women. /i//i/

In the example above, the "teacher" (Jorge) has correctly pointed out that women is plural and that the correct form of the verb is "are," thus giving Waldemar a "lesson" in English morphology and syntax. His mastery of phonology is still shaky, however, inasmuch as he does not produce the correct form /wimin/ until after repeating the word three times.

V. OTHER FINDINGS

Just as this research confirmed many of the findings reported by Schwartz, it also produced certain features which were not present in that study. To begin with, this research involved subjects of the same language background (Spanish); Schwartz had used subjects of mixed language background. In Schwartz's study the subjects did not understand each other's native language; thus, they were forced to use English as the only vehicle for communication. On no occasion did any of them resort to their native language. Conversely, in this study, the students' native tongue cropped up occasionally during their discourse. It must be pointed out, however, that the use of Spanish was extremely controlled and restricted, and in proportion to the use of English almost insignificant. The use

of Spanish included some cases of lexical transfer ("millas" for miles, "ahora" for now, "maratones" for marathons), of routine patterns ("Tú sabes"), spaceholders ("esto," "entonces"), exclamations ("Bendito!"), and certain formulas to keep conversation going ("¿qué te pregunto?," "dime otra cosa"). This finding suggests that conversations in English between monolingual ESL students do include use of the vernacular but that this use does not alarmingly undermine the practice of the second language which ESL teachers so earnestly try to promote. On the contrary, the Puerto Rican subjects in this study seemed to cling tenaciously to English--even when their command of it was tenuous--once they had been instructed to do so. Their resort to Spanish was sporadic rather than continued: never did it occur continuously for more than one turn; unconscious rather than conscious: the use of language crutches like "esto," "entonces," which respond more to habit than to intention, seems to attest to that; unheeded rather than contagious: if one of the students used Spanish the other did not take advantage of this opportunity to lapse into Spanish him/herself. Of course, it must be remembered that the teacher was present in this study while the conversations were being taped. Teacher presence (or absence) and proximity seem to be important variables in the use of the vernacular within the monolingual ESL/EFL class. (See Abbott 1981.)

Another major difference with Schwartz's study was that in this situation the students' conversations in the second language were induced rather than spontaneous. Schwartz's mixed-language subjects were taped as they were freely talking in English during breaks between ESL classes. Basic ESL students in Puerto Rico never do that. In general, ESL Puerto Rican students do not normally carry on conversations in English with their peers outside the classroom. Unlike Schwartz's subjects, who need English as a common language for communication, the vehicle for socialization of the students in Puerto Rico is Spanish. Therefore, in the first place, the artificiality of the set-up: the subjects responded to a previous appointment for the research and they were taped in a non-natural setting (the video studio); in the second place,

the unnaturalness of the discourse itself: the students were overly conscious of the their use of English and that they had to keep the conversation going. Evidence of their conscious effort to comply with the teacher-imposed task of talking in the second language came from both extralinguistic and linguistic features. Long pauses, sidelong glances, nervous giggles, and such expressions as "what else?...," "dime otra cosa," "you're talking," "I first," "¿qué te pregunto?," "¿tenemos que seguir?" are all signs of forced communication rather than self-motivated discourse. These observations are not meant to belittle the importance of conversations among ESL Puerto Rican students. Quite the opposite, given the limited opportunities that ESL students in Puerto Rico have to practice English, peer interaction must be encouraged and appreciated, even if resulting in somewhat unnatural verbal exchanges.

The task-oriented nature of these students' conversations was another singularity of the research. While Schwartz's subjects were merely engaged in random conversation, the subjects in this study had been assigned to do a segment of pair work at the beginning of their taping sessions. This accounted for certain phenomena non-existent in Schwartz's study; for example, the occurrence of self-repair and other-repair during reading aloud, the relatively uninhibited disposition for and acceptance of other-initiated repair and outright other-repair, and the rigorous turn-taking routines.

In relation to pair work another finding was that proficiency and personality factors do affect the organization of the discourse. It was usually the more proficient and self-assured members of the dyads (Jorge, Vilma, and Juan) the ones who led the conversations. Higher proficiency seemed to correlate with more aggressive tactics in conversation: starting or changing topics as well as establishing, demanding, and even usurping turns!

V. CONCLUSION

In summation, this research has demonstrated that monolingual ESL students behave very similarly to students of mixed language backgrounds when conversing in English. Puerto Rican students, for example, are capable of negotiating meaning and of repairing trouble sources in their English conversations. Their negotiations include both linguistic and extralinguistic strategies, and their repairs are both self-initiated and other-initiated. As is true for native speakers and for mixed-language ESL learners, Puerto Rican students show a preference for self-correction. However, other-correction also occurs particularly in the areas of syntax and lexicon and when the students are doing exercises in their textbooks. Certainly, this study indicated that second language learners can learn from one another and that although the native language does appear, if the teacher is present, it will not represent a serious threat to the practice of the second language. Pair work proved to be a rich source of interaction, providing content and organization to the students' discourse as well as an invaluable opportunity for the students to negotiate meaning and manipulate sentences in the second language. Even though they were not self-motivated to converse in English, the Puerto Rican learners in this study demonstrated, and hopefully realized, that English can be alternate vehicle for socialization: a means for them to make friends and get to know their peers better.

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